

Rules of the Graduate School at ISTA

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1. Preamble

Educating graduate students is one of the core missions of ISTA (“the Institute”). The Institute strives to attract doctoral students from all over the world and provide them with a training as researchers of the highest international standard. The overarching goal of the ISTA Graduate School is to produce intellectually broad, curious, open-minded scientists who are able to approach problems from multiple angles and who can compete with scientists trained in the best Graduate Schools worldwide. The educational objectives for ISTA PhD graduates are:

- The ability to independently identify, analyze, and solve a range of fundamental research problems with depth and breadth
- An awareness of research cultures and methodologies across disciplinary boundaries, and a facility for working with different kinds of scientists
- Personal and professional integrity
- Clear oral and written communication skills
- Preparation for a range of future careers.

In order to achieve the educational objectives, these Rules follow standards widely accepted by top international Graduate Schools. The content, spirit, and any interpretation of these Rules should follow international standards and best practices.

2. Principles of Graduate Education at ISTA

To support the educational objectives for its PhD graduates, the Institute will adhere to the following overarching principles of graduate education:

2.1 *Rigorous centralized admissions*

All PhD students are admitted to the Graduate School rather than to individual research groups, through a competitive selection process. This ensures a uniformly high admissions standard. Candidates with Bachelor's or Master's degrees (or equivalent) are eligible for admission.

2.2 *Broad and shared graduate experience based on a flexible program that supports interdisciplinarity*

All students complete part of their training as a cohort that extends beyond individual research groups or narrowly defined fields. This exposes students to different research cultures and allows them to build a broad network of peers. The Graduate School enables students to build flexible curricula adapted to their educational backgrounds and research interests; its rules do not restrict the students' course, rotation or affiliation choices, or require the students to commit upfront to binding disciplinary curricula. The Graduate School supports, but does not require, interdisciplinary education and research. Its organizational structures promote interdisciplinary engagement of students and faculty.

2.3 *A structured training program with specific milestones*

Graduate education at the Institute consists of: 1) curricular requirements that develop scientific breadth, depth, ethics, and transferrable skills; 2) an initial unaffiliated phase in which students gain experience in different research environments; 3) affiliation with a research group and selection of a PhD thesis supervisor; 4) a qualifying exam that assesses the background knowledge and ability to conduct independent research; 5) submission and defense of a PhD thesis describing an original and significant contribution to knowledge.

2.4 *Broad supervision arrangements with regular opportunities for feedback*

All students are overseen not only by their thesis supervisor, but also by a thesis committee and by the faculty as a whole. Regular formal student review procedures ensure that the supervisory body is informed of student progress. Students also have access to independent mentors and support systems. The ultimate responsibility for all students lies with the Dean of the Graduate School.

2.5 *Guaranteed financial support and full employment status*

All students making reasonable progress towards their PhD degrees are guaranteed full employment status at the Institute for the duration of their studies, including full-time salaries with full social security benefits at levels determined by the Institute.

3. Implementation of the PhD program

The Federal Law on IST Austria as last amended by Federal Law Gazette I No. 75/2020 ("the Law") authorizes the Institute to offer PhD and combined MS-PhD programs. In accordance with the Law, the Institute has established a single interdisciplinary PhD program with multiple "tracks", which also offers students an option to obtain an MS degree en-route to PhD. This Section of the "Rules of the Graduate School" specifies how the Institute's PhD program adheres to each of the Principles of Graduate Education (Section 2). Detailed guidelines and

operational procedures of the PhD program (“PhD program rules”) based on these “Rules of the Graduate School” are regularly evaluated, updated, approved by the Dean, and compiled annually into the Graduate School Handbook (Section 4).

3.1 *Rigorous centralized admissions*

3.1.1 *Centralized application*

Students apply to the Graduate School of the Institute, rather than to individual research groups. Every year, the Dean determines an application deadline, normally in January. If the yield of the first admission round is unsatisfactory, the Dean may set a second round.

3.1.2 *Centralized selection*

Students are selected with input from the entire Institute faculty, ensuring that each qualifying application is assessed by multiple faculty members. To organize the selection process, the Dean may assemble various selection committees and organize the corresponding selection meetings. To be admitted to the Graduate School, the Dean must ultimately approve every student that passes the selection process. Individual professors may not admit PhD students.

3.1.3 *Minimum entry requirements*

A student can be admitted to the Graduate School only after completing a Bachelor’s or a Master’s degree (or equivalent). Admission will typically happen before the completion of the degree, but will be conditional on completion of the degree by the uniform start date of the program (Section 3.2.1). The equivalence of degrees is decided by the Dean. The Dean has the right to relax minimum entry requirements, accept incomplete applications, or waive the application deadline in individual cases.

3.1.4 *Selection criteria*

By the application deadline, every applicant must submit a full application file in English. Application materials should include a CV, a statement of purpose, official university transcripts, and three recommendation letters sent by referees directly to the Graduate School. The CV and transcript must contain all university-level education and grades. The statement of purpose should explain the research interests of the applicant and their motivation for applying to the Graduate School, but they need not contact a professor before applying.

3.2 *Broad and shared graduate experience based on a flexible program that supports interdisciplinarity*

3.2.1 *Semester structure & uniform start date*

The academic year is divided into two semesters: Fall and Spring. Each semester approximately follows the schedule of Austrian university semesters and contains 12 weeks of instruction. Blocked courses are normally taught only outside of regular semesters, in order to allow students to build curricula with courses offered at the Institute as well as the universities in Vienna.

Before the start of every academic year, the Dean announces the academic calendar which determines the dates for all teaching and non-teaching periods and other important PhD

program deadlines. Specifically, the Dean determines a uniform start date when the admitted student cohort begins the PhD program, normally in September. Employment at the Institute may start earlier, for example in cases where students are employed as scientific interns. Late start dates may be approved by the Dean in exceptional cases, but should usually be no later than the start of the Fall semester.

3.2.2 Training that extends beyond an individual research group or a narrowly defined field

Examples of training activities that extend beyond narrowly defined fields include, but are not limited to, a required core curriculum, course breadth requirements, and/or rotations. To ensure a strong feeling of community within each cohort, at least some of these requirements should be completed together by all students starting the PhD program in a given academic year. The Graduate School Handbook specifies how these requirements are to be fulfilled.

3.2.3 Tracks

Tracks are organizational structures of the Graduate School that correspond to broad and often overlapping fields of science aligned with the research interests of the Institute faculty.

By design, Tracks permit the students the flexibility and interdisciplinarity in their training, and allow faculty to teach and supervise students across different fields of science (Section 2.2). Tracks are orthogonal to other administrative structures at the Institute, specifically to the Research Areas. Track activities are coordinated by faculty members who act as Track Representatives to the Graduate School (Section 4.3).

Tracks have four primary purposes:

- (1) to allow the faculty to shape a suitable curriculum and efficiently plan curriculum offerings within a scientific field
- (2) to permit distributed academic oversight of the students' progress
- (3) to interpret and apply the rules in the Graduate School Handbook in a way that is consistent with the cultural and scientific conventions of a particular field of science
- (4) to establish a shared sense of expectations and community among the students of a given track; tracks also facilitate communication between the Graduate School and the Institute faculty.

Faculty are not assigned to individual tracks, but are expected to participate in the activities of one or more tracks. The participating faculty – the so-called Track Faculty – are responsible for organizing and teaching courses offered in a track and for ensuring that key courses are taught regularly. Track Faculty also takes collective responsibility for the track students. Each track must meet at least twice annually in Track Meetings chaired by the Track Representative to: (i) discuss the progress of all track students; and (ii) prepare the course offerings for the subsequent year and agree on faculty teaching commitments.

The tracks can issue recommendations (but cannot unilaterally impose requirements) that reflect special needs and cultures of different disciplines, e.g., track-specific required courses or training, qualifying exam formats, conditions related to conferring of PhD or MS degrees, etc. If, after a discussion in a Track Meeting, the Track Faculty support a new track-specific requirement, the Track Representative will forward such a proposal for discussion to the Track Representatives Committee (Section 4.4). After receiving a recommendation of the Track

Representatives Committee, the Dean must check that the proposal is consistent with the Principles of Graduate Education at ISTA (Section 2) and may either approve or reject the proposal. All track requirements must be published in the Graduate School Handbook.

For the purpose of academic oversight, each student is assigned to a single track. Students may choose to change their track assignments freely until they pass their qualifying exam; after they pass the qualifying exam, the Dean must approve any track change request. Students can take courses from any track, and the track assignment does not restrict their choice of which group they can rotate or affiliate with.

A new track can be formed on the initiative of multiple professors that submit an argued letter to the Dean. The Dean assesses the initiative in terms of its merits for the current and future scientific interests represented at the Institute, and the capacity of the initiating faculty to suitably perform all track functions without negatively impacting the PhD program. If the Dean's assessment of the merits is positive, the Dean assembles a Working Group dedicated to forming the new track within the Annual Consultation cycle (Section 4.5), to broadly consult the faculty and to establish potential transition arrangements. After considering the Working Group recommendations, the Dean may approve or decline the formation of the new track.

3.3 *A structured training program with specific milestones*

3.3.1 *Curricular requirements*

Students complete a variety of taught and research curricular requirements to ensure that they meet the educational objectives of the Graduate School (Section 1). These requirements are specified in the Graduate School Handbook, but must include:

- (i) training that students complete in large peer groups and/or as a full cohort, to foster a community spirit and scientific breadth (Section 3.2.2)
- (ii) training in ethics and communication skills, with possibilities for further skills development (e.g., in technology transfer or science education)
- (iii) a course requirement amounting to a minimum of 24 ECTS, to provide the students both with the scientific depth necessary for graduate-level research and with scientific breadth beyond their immediate field of research
- (iv) rotations / research projects requirement, to be completed during the unaffiliated phase (Section 3.3.5)
- (v) teaching experience, typically by acting as a teaching assistant for at least one course.

The Graduate School Handbook details how these requirements take into account individual students' educational backgrounds, enable flexible curricula and promote interdisciplinarity (Section 2.2).

The Graduate School will make public, prior to the start of the academic year, all curricular elements (e.g., courses, skills training workshops, rotation and research project formats etc.) that can be taken to satisfy the curricular requirements; this includes the ECTS equivalent of all offered curricular elements.

The Graduate School will issue a transcript documenting all completed curricular elements and their ECTS equivalents upon student request.

3.3.2 *External graduate programs*

If approved by the Dean, a student of the Graduate School may participate in an additional, external structured graduate program. The requirements of the external program must be compatible with the requirements of the Graduate School; if any requirements are waived, this must happen explicitly and in advance by the Dean.

3.3.3 *Degrees and Certificates*

The Graduate School issues Master's (MS) and Doctoral (PhD) degrees.

MS degrees require a total workload equivalent of 120 ECTS and are only issued *en-route* to PhD (Section 3.3.4). MS degrees are issued without field-specific designations by default, but a student may request a primary and/or secondary focus specialization, in accordance with the criteria laid down in the Graduate School Handbook.

PhD degrees require a total curricular workload equivalent of 60 ECTS in addition to the completion of research milestones that end with a successful thesis submission and defense (Sections 3.3.6, 3.3.7, 3.3.8). PhD degrees are issued by the Institute without any field-specific designations. The curricular workload required for the PhD degree can be used for both the PhD degree and an MS *en-route* to the PhD.

The Graduate School can also establish and issue additional requirements-based Certificates, as proof of training beyond the completion of MS or PhD requirements (e.g., certificates in "science education" or "technology transfer").

3.3.4 *Master's degree en-route to PhD*

The Graduate School only admits students who wish to pursue a PhD degree. However, students who fulfil specified academic requirements while enrolled in the Institute's PhD program can also request a Master's degree. This degree is optional and is not required for the PhD degree. This is referred to as a "MS *en-route* to PhD option".

The academic requirements for the Master's degree issued by the Institute include both curricular and thesis components, broadly in line with the standard 120 ECTS European workload for a Master's degree. They are specified in detail in the Graduate School Handbook; PhD curricular requirements (Section 3.3.1) count towards the MS requirements. Tracks have the responsibility to prepare curricular offerings that are comparable with international standards for Master's degrees.

As a general principle, the Graduate School will consider the student's wish to pursue the MS degree option as secondary to their work towards the PhD degree: should the duties and requirements of the PhD come into conflict with the duties and requirements of the MS, the former take precedence for the student and the Graduate School.

In exceptional cases granted by the Dean, PhD students whose employment is terminated before they have successfully defended and filed a PhD thesis (Section 3.5.3), yet who nevertheless fulfil the requirements for the Master *en-route* to PhD option, can be awarded a Master's degree.

3.3.5 An initial unaffiliated phase in which students explore different research environments

A defining feature of graduate education at the Institute is an initial unaffiliated phase in which students explore different research groups, fields, or methodologies. This exploration occurs during a defined period before affiliation, usually through rotations in different research groups, in accordance with rules laid down in the Graduate School Handbook. The goal of the unaffiliated phase is to ensure a good fit between the student and the thesis supervisor, and to expose students to a range of different research cultures and methodologies.

3.3.6 Affiliation with a research group and selection of a thesis supervisor

All students must affiliate with a research group and find a thesis supervisor after the initial unaffiliated phase and before the time of the qualifying exam. The supervisor must be a professor at the Institute. If desired, a co-supervisor (or multiple co-supervisors) may also be appointed. The co-supervisor(s) may be professors or staff scientists at the Institute, or external persons approved by the Dean.

The Dean must approve any requests for change of supervision (supervisor or co-supervisor) and can terminate supervision arrangements.

In the case of a supervisor leaving the Institute, the student is encouraged to physically move with the supervisor but is given the option of remotely receiving a PhD degree from ISTA (provided that all requirements for the Institute's PhD program are met and that the student does not also receive a PhD from the new host institution). In such cases and upon approval of the Dean, the supervisor may continue to supervise the student, and a local faculty representative is additionally appointed to oversee the student's progress and report to the Graduate School. Students whose supervisor leaves can usually remain at the Institute only if they are in the final stages of thesis submission or if they find a new supervisor among the Institute faculty.

3.3.7 Thesis committee

Each student assembles a thesis committee before the time of the qualifying exam. The committee consists of the supervisor and at least two other members: one must be an Institute faculty member and the other must be an external person holding a PhD degree with a faculty or equivalent position elsewhere. In case of doubt, the Dean decides on the suitability of proposed external thesis committee members. If there are co-supervisors, then the committee must include two additional thesis committee members in addition to the (co-)supervisors. Any changes in the thesis committee must be approved by the Dean.

The thesis committee administers the qualifying exam and the thesis defense. It is further responsible for monitoring the student's academic progress from qualifying exam until thesis defense, and giving advice and support to the student and the supervisor. The thesis committee members can be asked by the Dean to assess the student-supervisor relationship and, if necessary, mediate misunderstandings or conflicts.

3.3.8 Qualifying exam

Students must demonstrate their readiness to pursue independent research by passing the qualifying exam within 2 years of starting the PhD program (not including any official maternity, paternity, sick leaves).

The qualifying exam is administered by a thesis committee and an exam chair, who presides over the exam but normally asks no questions. The exam chair must not be a member of the committee, but must be an Institute faculty member.

The qualifying exam consists at least of:

- 1) An oral presentation of the research proposal, followed by a defense. The research proposal must motivate an independently conceived research problem and put it into the context of existing work in the field.
- 2) An exam about the broad field in line with track conventions (Section 4.3), usually in the form of a reading list or syllabus set by the thesis committee.

The thesis committee must document and communicate to students its rules and procedures regarding what constitutes a pass, a fail with option to retry, or a fail without option to retry. In most cases there should be one opportunity to retry the exam within a clearly defined timeline.

The time period before passing the qualifying exam is referred to as Phase 1 of the PhD program. The time period from passing the qualifying exam until successful thesis defense is referred to as Phase 2 of the PhD program.

3.3.9 Thesis submission and defense

All students must successfully submit and defend a PhD thesis, usually within 5 years of the start date in the PhD program. Extensions beyond 5 years must be approved by the Dean, and extensions beyond 6 years must be approved by the President.

The thesis defense can be scheduled only if every member of the thesis committee (Section 3.3.7) and the exam chair has received a draft thesis and every committee member allows the defense to take place. Normally a committee member should allow the defense only if they are willing to accept the draft thesis with minor modifications. Requested modifications need to be listed and made available to the student at the latest at the time of the defense. Once every committee member allows the defense, the defense should be scheduled and publicly announced, typically 1 month in advance.

The thesis defense consists of a public part and a closed part. The public part starts with an oral presentation of the draft thesis in the presence of the thesis committee, the exam chair presiding over the defense, and a public audience. The presentation of the draft thesis is followed by questions from the audience. In the closed part, the committee members and the defense chair may ask additional questions about the draft thesis and request modifications.

Immediately after the defense, the thesis committee and the defense chair meet in private. They must determine one of two outcomes: accept the thesis with possible minor modifications, or reject the thesis. The thesis can be accepted only if there is unanimous agreement among the committee and the defense chair, who must together and immediately write a report that justifies their decision. If they agree to accept, the report must contain a list of all requested minor modifications. If the thesis is rejected, then the student has the right to appeal to the Dean, who ultimately decides the final outcome for the student.

A final thesis signed by all members of the thesis committee must be submitted to the defense chair within 3 months of the thesis defense. By signing, each committee member accepts the modifications from the draft thesis. If no such final thesis is submitted in time, the defense

chair may grant an extension of 1 month. If no final thesis is submitted by the end of the extension, then the Dean decides the final outcome for the student.

Once a final thesis is submitted, the President awards the PhD degree on recommendation by the Dean. Normally, a degree statement will be issued immediately upon submission of the final thesis and an official PhD Diploma will be issued annually, at a date determined by the Dean (Section 3.2.1).

3.4 Broad supervision arrangements with regular opportunities for feedback

3.4.1 Faculty responsibility

Each faculty member of the Institute is associated with the Graduate School, and is expected to participate in its activities and share its responsibilities.

Professors hold individual responsibility for the students that they directly supervise as well as collective responsibility for all students in the Graduate School. The collective responsibility comprises, but is not limited to, broad faculty participation in teaching courses (as stipulated in their offer letters, each professor of ISTA can be asked by the Dean to teach 6 ECTS course equivalent per academic year), participating in admissions (Section 3.1), supervising rotations and research projects, mentoring (Section 3.3.6), participation in thesis committees (Section 3.3.7), chairing PhD thesis defenses and qualifying exams, participation in Track Meetings for student oversight and curricular development within the tracks (Sections 3.2.3 and 4.3), as well as serving in the Track Representative or Deputy Track Representative roles (Section 4.3).

The Dean ensures that these responsibilities are met by individual faculty members, taking into account all their contributions to the Graduate School (Section 4.2).

3.4.2 Advice from mentor

Every admitted PhD student is assigned a mentor, who must be an Institute faculty member. The mentor regularly meets with the student until the student chooses a supervisor. After affiliation, students are encouraged to stay in touch with their mentor.

3.4.3 Periodic supervision and review by thesis committee members

While students and their supervisors should meet regularly, all Phase 2 students must formally meet with their supervisor and one additional thesis committee member at least once per year for a progress review. The express purpose of the meeting is to complete a formal progress report and update the Graduate School Portfolio: a CV that details the student's academic activities in the Graduate School and their progress towards the thesis. If the student has a co-supervisor, then they must be present in these meetings as well.

The Dean sets the deadlines for the annual progress reports; these reports will be discussed at Track Meetings. Conditions for additional progress reviews may be recommended by the Track Faculty or the Track Representative, and can be set individually by the Dean.

3.4.4 Supervision and review by tracks

All student progress reports are reviewed after the progress review deadline by the Track Representative and, at a Track Meeting, by the Track Faculty. The Track Faculty bears

collective responsibility for the track students and can issue recommendations about individual students. The Track Representative may interact with track students and the involved faculty to address any issues (Section 3.2.3). Cases demanding special attention (e.g., unsatisfactory progress reports, supervisory or group conflicts, warnings and dismissals, extensions and exceptions) are presented with Track Representative recommendations to the Dean, to consider and take appropriate action. In problem cases, the Dean may warn a student or dismiss the student from the Graduate School by terminating the student's contract (Section 3.5.3). Every performance-related warning and dismissal must be discussed with the ISTA faculty involved in the student's supervision and mentoring, approved by the Dean, and communicated to the Track Faculty. Students usually receive a warning before a dismissal.

3.4.5 Access to additional support for students

In addition to support structures within the Graduate School, students have access to campus-wide resources, such as the conflict management system (for workplace conflicts) and Good Practice Officer, the ombudspersons (for scientific misconduct), and Ethics Officer, mental health and medical professionals, and various forms of counseling.

3.5 Guaranteed financial support and full employment status

3.5.1 Admission of students

The number of students admitted to the Graduate School in any given academic year should be commensurate with the number of students that faculty expect to affiliate. The Dean makes the final determination regarding the total number of offers to be made each year. Funding for each student must, under the condition of continuous satisfactory progress, be guaranteed for the full duration of each student's contract, either by the Graduate School (e.g., in the form of a fellowship), by one or more research groups, or by external funds.

3.5.2 Employment duration

Every PhD student is given an employment contract for the expected duration of the PhD, initially 5 years from the start date of the PhD program. All students are employed full-time until the submission of their final thesis; exceptions require approval by the Dean.

Any professional or educational external activities of students, including simultaneous employment (including self-employment) or enrollment in other academic programs (including externally funded doctoral schools), require approval by the Dean. In the case of outside employment or remunerated external activities, the President must also approve. In case of external activities related to intellectual property, the Authorized Person for IP must also approve. As a principle, students must not be simultaneously enrolled in another degree program anywhere.

3.5.3 Employment termination

The employment contract for PhD students gives the Institute the right to terminate the contract for the following reasons:

- (1) if the student fails to fulfil PhD program requirements, including if the outcome of the qualifying exam is fail without option to retry, or if the student fails to affiliate with a research group within the deadlines specified by the PhD program

- (2) if the student fails to make at least “Satisfactory Progress” towards the PhD degree as evaluated in formal progress reviews (Sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4)
- (3) if the student has successfully defended and filed a thesis
- (4) if the student breaches the rules of scientific and employee conduct as detailed in the “Rules for Employees of IST Austria” or as specified by Austrian labor law.

3.5.4 Salary levels

All students in the PhD program at ISTA receive full-time salaries and full social security benefits at levels set by the Institute, unless a funding agency requests a higher salary. If a student receives funds from external sources which are lower than the comparable ISTA salary, the student salary must be supplemented up to the ISTA level.

4. Organization and Governance Structures of the Graduate School

4.1 President and Scientific Board

The Scientific Board carries out supervision of the Graduate School. It must be heard before the introduction of new degree programs and must approve changes to the Rules of the Graduate School, submitted by the President and the Dean. The Dean and the Chair of the Advisory Committee (Section 5) report annually on the status and development of the Graduate School and on its future plans.

Implementation details for these Rules as well as detailed requirements and procedures of the PhD program, its tracks, and the MS option are specified in the Graduate School Handbook, which is updated annually and approved by the Dean.

The President must be informed and approve any major changes to the PhD program rules, as well as major or repeated exceptions with respect to the Rules of the Graduate School made under Dean’s authority. Pursuant to the Law, the President awards the academic degree “Doctor of Philosophy” upon the successful completion of a PhD program, and the academic degree “Master of Science” to qualifying students after they successfully complete the MS requirements (Section 3.3.4).

4.2 Dean

The Graduate School is headed by the Dean of the Graduate School. The Dean is a Vice President of ISTA, who is appointed by the Board of Trustees on recommendation by the President.

The Dean is responsible for an inclusive, equitable, safe, and productive environment for the graduate students as well as for resolving conflicts involving graduate students or the Graduate School.

To carry out this responsibility when a serious or recurring conflict between a student (or students) and their supervisor (or any other Institute employee) is indicated, the Dean may directly trigger the conciliation step of the Conflict Management System at the Institute, and provide the Good Practice Officer with a mandate to assess the conflict situation. Based on its

outcome and after discussing with the concerned parties, the Dean may issue a letter prescribing further actions to remedy the conflict or prevent it from recurring, and may also formally inform the President accordingly.

The Dean is further responsible for:

- (1) upholding the Principles of Graduate Education (Section 2)
- (2) compliance with the Rules of the Graduate School
- (3) ensuring a fair contribution of faculty members towards Graduate School activities
- (4) approving changes to the Graduate School Handbook or any other program rules
- (5) granting exceptions to the Rules of the Graduate School
- (6) presenting major program rule changes and exceptions for review and approval to the President and the Scientific Board, as appropriate (Section 4.1)
- (7) interacting with the Advisory Committee for the Graduate School (Section 5).

The Dean may ask the President to appoint a Deputy to the Dean from the faculty in order to assist the Dean and ensure continuity of Graduate School leadership and operations. Usually the Chair of the Track Representatives Committee is chosen as Deputy to the Dean (Section 4.4). The Dean may delegate to the Deputy any operational matters but must personally make final decisions wherever the Dean's approval is required by these Rules. The Deputy takes over the Dean's responsibilities wherever the Dean has a conflict of interest.

4.3 *Track Representatives, Track Faculty, and Student Track Representatives*

Every track (Section 3.2.3) is represented by one Track Representative. Track Representatives are faculty members responsible for curricular content, for overseeing students, and for maintaining a collegial and well-functioning student-faculty community within their tracks. They chair the Track Meetings (Section 3.2.3), oversee curriculum planning within the track, advise students on their courses, rotations, affiliation, and research choices, review the academic progress of students in their track (Section 3.4.4), and ensure that the rules of the PhD program specified in the Graduate School Handbook are followed within their track. If necessary, they may interpret and apply these rules with reference to the academic conventions of their respective scientific fields. Track Representatives can delegate some of their duties to Deputy Track Representatives.

Track Representatives and Deputy Track Representatives are appointed by the Dean after consultation with the President and the Track Faculty.

The Track Faculty (Section 3.2.3) is collectively responsible for developing the track, for overseeing the progress of the track students, and for offering the necessary curricular elements of the track regularly. It must be consulted by the Track Representative, by calling a Track Meeting, to discuss any proposals for changes in track requirements or recommendations.

Graduate students of a given track select a Student Track Representative to represent their interests, contribute to curriculum planning, convey their feedback in academic matters to the Graduate School, and facilitate the establishment of an open, trusting, and well-functioning student-faculty community.

Track Representatives and/or their Deputies and Student Track Representatives meet in regular meetings to oversee operational issues necessary for running the PhD program.

Track Representatives, their Deputies, and Student Track Representatives may be asked by the Dean to participate in various Working Groups, as part of the Annual Consultation cycle (Section 4.5).

4.4 *Track Representatives Committee*

Collectively, the faculty Track Representatives comprise the Track Representatives Committee. The Dean appoints the Chair of the Track Representatives Committee, who need not be one of the Track Representatives. The Track Representatives Committee meets regularly to discuss the general development of the Graduate School and the needs of individual tracks, and to keep the different tracks aligned and informed about each other. The Track Representatives Committee discusses proposals brought to its attention by the Dean or by individual tracks (Section 3.2.3). All proposed changes to the rules, requirements, and procedures of the PhD program, or any of its tracks, and all changes to the Graduate School Handbook must be reviewed by the Track Representatives Committee, which may comment on the proposed changes.

The Dean may call a special meeting of the Track Representative Committee to consult about issues of importance to the Graduate School.

The Dean may delegate to the Committee the power to decide recurring issues of broad importance, including various student or faculty requests relating to the Graduate School, or to authorize certain exceptions.

4.5 *Annual Consultation cycle*

To develop the PhD program, its rules, procedures, and curricular components, the Graduate School typically follows an Annual Consultation cycle that is aligned with the academic year.

The Annual Consultation cycle is transparent, inclusive of faculty, students and other Graduate School stakeholders at the Institute, and provides opportunities for feedback, evaluation, and improvement of the PhD program.

This cycle consists of:

- 1) An Open Meeting, conducted typically in the Fall and open to all Graduate School stakeholders, which outlines the state of the Graduate School, the PhD program, its tracks, the MS option, and the development plans.
- 2) Formation of any Working Groups, assembled by the Dean from faculty members, graduate students, or other stakeholders, as appropriate. Working Groups may tackle defined questions related to the PhD program as a whole which require broad consultation, or they may be track-specific. Written recommendations are reported to the Dean and the faculty, and are made public to the Graduate School stakeholders.
- 3) Preparation of any relevant document updates, especially updates to the Graduate School Handbook, by the Dean. These updates subsequently undergo their respective consultation and approval processes (Sections 4.1 and 4.4).
- 4) Rules and procedures of the PhD program and MS option, which are compiled annually into the Graduate School Handbook, are announced to the students, faculty, and other

Graduate Student stakeholders before the start of the upcoming academic year, typically to become valid on the uniform start date of the program (Section 3.2.1).

The Dean has the authority to make any changes to the PhD program rules and Graduate School Handbook also outside of the Annual Consultation cycle, subject to the consultation of the Track Representatives Committee and (if necessary) approval by the President (Sections 4.1 and 4.4).

5. Quality assurance in the Graduate School

The “Advisory Committee for the Graduate School” consists of members currently working outside of Austria. Advisory Committee members are selected for their distinction in higher education, research, and academic management. The Chair and majority of the Advisory Committee members must be members of the Scientific Board of the Institute, but the Advisory Committee may also comprise experts in education or academic management who are not Scientific Board members. The Dean suggests the size of the Advisory Committee and proposes a list of candidates to the President. The President issues a recommendation to the Board of Trustees to make any necessary appointments to the Scientific Board. Then, after consulting with the President, the Scientific Board appoints the Chair and the other members of the Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee should visit the Institute typically once every two years, to review all aspects of the Graduate School and its PhD program, including admissions procedures, program rules and requirements, the quality of training opportunities, statistics on student outcomes, and student feedback.

Following the site visit, the Advisory Committee will issue a report to the Dean, the President, and the Scientific Board. If appropriate, the report may contain confidential sections for a limited readership, but is otherwise made available to the faculty, students, and other stakeholders at the Institute. The report should provide a qualitative assessment that follows the highest international quality standards, is transparent to all parties involved, international in scope, and avoids conflicts of interest.

Advisory Committee recommendations will be reviewed during the next Open Meeting and may lead to the formation of new Working Groups (Section 4.5). The Dean will prepare a point-by-point response to the Advisory Committee report and make it available to the President, the Scientific Board, and all members of the Advisory Committee. The response will also be made available to the faculty, students, and other stakeholders at the Institute.

In addition to regular quality assurance by the Advisory Committee, the President or the Scientific Board may at any time call for an ad-hoc review of the Graduate School or any of its parts.